

On the Nature and Uses of Sabotage.

"SABOTAGE" is a derivative of "sabot," which is French for a wooden shoe. It means going slow, with a dragging, clumsy movement, such as that manner of footgear may be expected to bring on. So it has come to describe any maneuvers of slowing-down, inefficiency, bungling, obstruction. In American usage the word is very often taken to mean forcible obstruction, destructive tactics, industrial frightfulness, incendiarism and high explosives, although that is plainly not its first meaning nor its common meaning. Nor is that its ordinary meaning as the word is used among those who have advocated a recourse to sabotage as a means of enforcing an argument about wages or the condition of work. The ordinary meaning of the word is better defined by an expression which has latterly come into use among the I. W. W., "conscientious withdrawal of efficiency"—although that phrase does not cover all that is rightly to be included under this technical term.

The sinister meaning which is often attached to the word in American usage, as denoting violence and disorder, appears to be due to the fact that the American usage has been shaped chiefly by persons and newspapers who have aimed to discredit the use of sabotage by organized workmen, and who have therefore laid stress on its less amiable manifestations. This is unfortunate. It lessens the usefulness of the word by making it a means of denunciation rather than of understanding. No doubt violent obstruction has had its share in the strategy of sabotage as carried on by disaffected workmen, as well as in the similar tactics of rival business concerns. It comes into the case as one method of sabotage, though by no means the most usual or the most effective; but it is so spectacular and shocking a method that it has drawn undue attention to itself. Yet such deliberate violence is, no doubt, a relatively minor fact in the case, as compared with that deliberate malingering, confusion, and misdirection of work that makes up the bulk of what the expert practitioners would recognize as legitimate sabotage.

The word first came into use among the organized French workmen, the members of certain *syndicats*, to describe their tactics of passive resistance, and it has continued to be associated with the strategy of these French workmen, who are known as *syndicalists*, and with their like-minded running-mates in other countries. But the tactics of these *syndicalists*, and their use of sabotage, do not differ, except in detail, from the tactics of other workmen

elsewhere, or from the similar tactics of friction, obstruction, and delay habitually employed, from time to time, by both employees and employers to enforce an argument about wages and prices. Therefore, in the course of a quarter-century past, the word has quite unavoidably taken on a general meaning in common speech, and has been extended to cover all such peaceable or surreptitious maneuvers of delay, obstruction, friction, and defeat, whether employed by the workmen to enforce their claims, or by the employers to defeat their employees, or by competitive business concerns to get the better of their business rivals or to secure their own advantage.

Such maneuvers of restriction, delay, and hindrance have a large share in the ordinary conduct of business; but it is only lately that this ordinary line of business strategy has come to be recognized as being substantially of the same nature as the ordinary tactics of the *syndicalists*. So that it has not been usual until the last few years to speak of maneuvers of this kind as sabotage when they are employed by employers and other business concerns. But all this strategy of delay, restriction, hindrance, and defeat is manifestly of the same character, and should conveniently be called by the same name, whether it is carried on by business men or by workmen; so that it is no longer unusual now to find workmen speaking of "capitalistic sabotage" as freely as the employers and the newspapers speak of *syndicalist sabotage*. As the word is now used, and as it is properly used, it describes a certain system of industrial strategy or management, whether it is employed by one or another. What it describes is a resort to peaceable or surreptitious restriction, delay, withdrawal, or obstruction.

Sabotage commonly works within the law, although it may often be within the letter rather than the spirit of the law. It is used to secure some special advantage or preference, usually of a businesslike sort. It commonly has to do with something in the nature of a vested right; which one or another of the parties in the case aims to secure or defend, or to defeat or diminish; some preferential right or special advantage in respect of income or privilege, something in the way of a vested interest. Workmen have resorted to such measures to secure improved conditions of work, or increased wages, or shorter hours, or to maintain their habitual standards, to all of which they have claimed to have some sort of a vested right. Any strike is of the nature of sabotage, of course. Indeed, a strike is a typical species of sabotage. That strikes have not been spoken of as sabotage is due to the accidental fact that strikes were in use before this word came into use. So also, of course, a lockout is another typical species of sabotage. That the lockout is employed by the employers against the employees does not change the fact that it is a means of defending a vested right by delay, withdrawal, defeat, and obstruction of the work to be done. Lockouts have not usually been spoken of as sabotage, for the same reason that holds true in the case of strikes. All the while it has been recognized that strikes and lockouts are of identically the same character.

All this does not imply that there is anything discreditable or immoral about this habitual use of strikes and lockouts. They are part of the ordinary conduct of industry under the existing system, and necessarily so. So long as the system remains unchanged these measures are a necessary and legitimate part of it. By virtue of his ownership the owner-employer has a vested right to do as he will with his own property, to deal or not to deal with any person that offers, to withhold or withdraw any part or all of his industrial equipment and natural resources from active use for the time being, to run on half time or to shut down his plant and to lock out all those persons for whom he has no present use on his own premises. There is no question that the lockout is altogether a legitimate maneuver. It may even be meritorious, and it is frequently considered to be meritorious when its use helps to maintain sound conditions in business—that is to say, profitable conditions, as frequently happens. Such is the view of the substantial citizens. So also is the strike legitimate, so long as it keeps within the law; and it may at times even be meritorious, at least in the eyes of the strikers. It is to be admitted quite broadly that both of these typical species of sabotage are altogether fair and honest in principle, al-

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though it does not therefore follow that every strike or every lockout is necessarily fair and honest in its working-out. That is in some degree a question of special circumstances.

Sabotage, accordingly, is not to be condemned out of hand, simply as such. There are many measures of policy and management both in private business and in public administration which are unmistakably of the nature of sabotage and which are not only considered to be excusable, but are deliberately sanctioned by statute and common law and by the public conscience. Many such measures are quite of the essence of the case under the established system of law and order, price and business, and are faithfully believed to be indispensable to the common good. It should not be difficult to show that the common welfare in any community which is organized on the price system cannot be maintained without a salutary use of sabotage—that is to say, such habitual recourse to delay and obstruction of industry and such restriction of output as will maintain prices at a reasonably profitable level and so guard against business depression. Indeed, it is precisely considerations of this nature that are now engaging the best attention of officials and business men in their endeavors to tide over a threatening depression in American business and a consequent season of hardship for all those persons whose main dependence is free income from investments.

(To be continued.)

PLATFORM Socialist Party of Canada

We, the Socialist Party of Canada, affirm our allegiance to, and support of, the principles and programme of the revolutionary working class.

Labor, applied to natural resources, produces all wealth. The present economic system is based upon capitalist ownership of the means of production, consequently, all the products of labor belong to the capitalist class. The capitalist is, therefore, master; the worker a slave.

So long as the capitalist class remains in possession of the reins of government all the powers of the State will be used to protect and defend its property rights in the means of wealth production and its control of the product of labor.

The capitalist system give to the capitalist an ever-swelling stream of profits, and to the worker, an ever-increasing measure of misery and degradation.

The interest of the working class lies in setting itself free from capitalist exploitation by the abolition of the wage system, under which this exploitation, at the point of production, is cloaked. To accomplish this necessitates the transformation of capitalist property in the means of wealth production into socially controlled economic forces.

The irrespressible conflict of interest between the capitalist and the worker necessarily expresses itself as a struggle for political supremacy. This is the Class Struggle.

Therefore, we call all workers to organize under the banner of the Socialist Party of Canada, with the object of conquering the political powers, for the purpose of setting up and enforcing the economic programme of the working class, as follows:

1. The transformation, as rapidly as possible, of capitalist property in the means of wealth production (natural resources, factories, mills, railroads, etc.) into collective means of production.
2. The organization and management of industry by the working class.
3. The establishment, as speedily as possible, of production for use instead of production for profit.